



Wyoming Homestead Lesson Plan (4th Grade)

Students will identify the key points of the Homestead Act of 1862 and investigate furnishing a homestead.

Objectives

- Students will examine the steps needed to “prove-up” on a claim within the Homestead Act of 1862.
- Students will actualize the real living space of early homesteads.

Preparation

Print the following texts and worksheets.

- [Homestead Act of 1862](#)
- [Worksheets One](#)
- [Homestead Dwellings](#)

Directions

Lesson One: Introduction to the Homestead Act Read the *Overview of the Homestead Act of 1862* as a class and assign student to small groups to answer questions on *Worksheet One*.

Utilize a class discussion to clarify knowledge about the Homestead Act. Be sure that the students understand the criteria for being a homesteader and the steps homesteaders needed to take to claim land.

Lesson Two: Homestead Dwellings Read the *Homestead Dwellings* introduction as a class. Challenge students to cut out the furniture and place it within the grid. After 5 minutes lead a discussion on the activity. *Was it difficult or easy to arrange all the furniture? What furniture is missing that is wanted? How could students “make space” with engineering?* Have students redesign their homestead with drawings of engineered space saving furniture.





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Overview of the Homestead Act of 1862

The Homestead Act, which was signed on May 20, 1862, by President Abraham Lincoln and passed into law on January 1st of 1863 significantly influenced the development of the United States. The Homestead Act made acquiring 160 acres of land possible for any man *or woman* willing to fulfill a list of requirements. The Homestead Act opened the west for settlement and eventually led to the granting of land to around 800,000 people before it was repealed in 1976.

To gain the title to free land, the following criteria had to be met first:

- A homesteader who was the head of a family, 21 years of age and an American citizen or person who had filed a declaration to become a citizen must file an application for a claim.
- A filing fee of \$10 and a commission between \$2 and \$4 must be paid at the local land office.
- The homesteader then had six months before he or she must take permanent residence on the land. The homesteader could not leave the land for a period longer than six months or the claim is forfeit.
- The homesteader must build a house and work the land for a period of 5 years prior to settling the claim. (The homesteader had a seven-year interval to work the land as an allowance for severe weather, plagues, insects, etc.)
- After working the land for five years, the homesteader then must find two witnesses who could verify that he or she had worked and resided on the land for the five-year period. The witnesses must then go to the local land office with the homesteader to sign the final documents which declared he or she “proved-up” on the claim. Another fee of between \$4 and \$6 was due.
- The homesteader also must post an ad in the local paper detailing his/her intention to file final claim on the land.

Other methods were also available to gain the land title.

- The homesteader could pay for the land at \$1.25 per acre after proving a six-month residency and trivial improvements.
- Veteran soldiers after 1872 could count their years of service towards the five-year requirement but were still required to prove a one-year residency.



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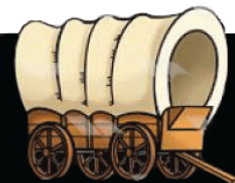
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Homestead Act Vocabulary

citizen	a legally recognized member of a country
claim	land area of the homesteader
commission	a fee paid for someone to do their work
declaration	a formal announcement
forfeit	to lose something
granting	agree to give or allow
homesteader	someone who lives and farms land given by the government
land office	a government office that records public lands' matters
prove-up	get the title to the land (homestead)
repealed	cancelled
reside	to live in a permanent home
residence	the place where someone lives
settle	determine or finish the steps for getting a claim
title	document giving ownership to the land
trivial	insignificant
witness	someone who sees an event



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Worksheet One: Discussion Questions on the Homestead Act 1862

Name the three basic requirements for filing a homestead application.

1. *Family Status:*
2. *Age:*
3. *Citizenship:*

List at least three requirements which made “proving-up” on a claim difficult?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

How was everyone able to benefit from the Homestead Act?

Pondering Questions:

In early U.S. history, land ownership was reserved for men. The Homestead Act changed norms of land ownership. How did the Homestead Act benefit women?



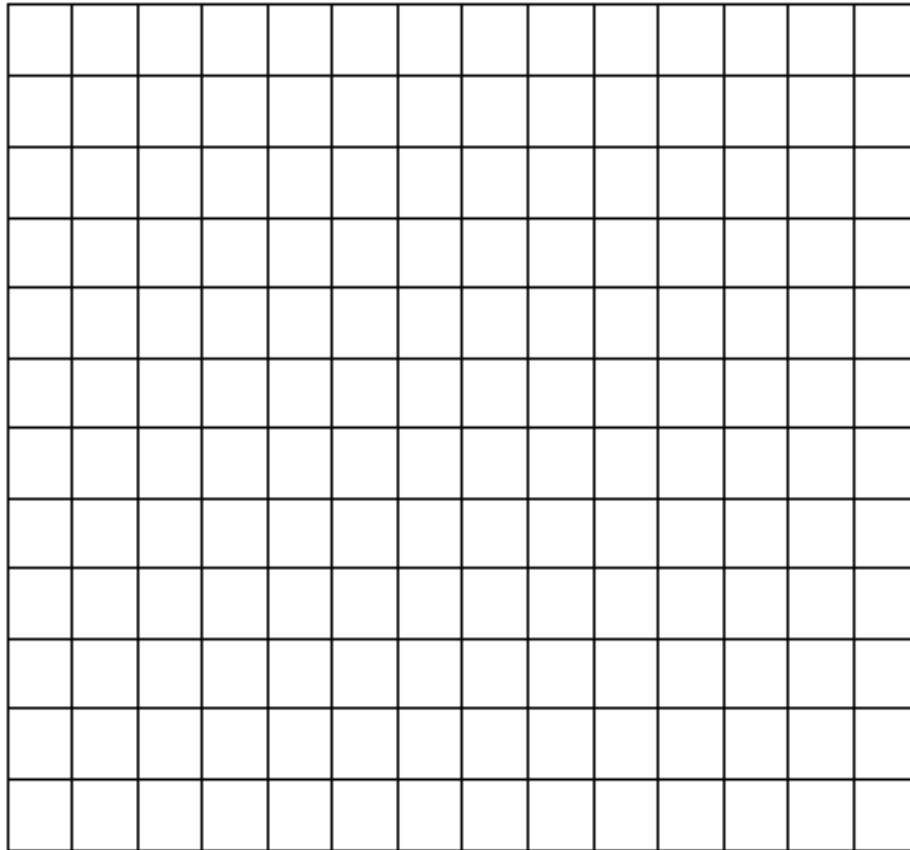
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Homestead Dwellings

Homestead dwellings were often built to fulfill the minimum 12 x 14 dimensions. Single homesteaders and even families would live in these small spaces for most of the year to *“prove-up”* on their land which took between five to seven years. Measure this space by walking 12 steps and then turning and walking 14 steps. Could you live in that space for five years? **Try to organize your homestead house by fitting all your furniture and needed supplies inside.** Hint: The furniture is scaled to size, and your room must contain supplies for your bedroom, kitchen, and living room.



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